

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1. (Original) A thermal separating process between at least one gaseous stream ascending in a separating column containing a sequence of mass transfer trays and a liquid stream descending in the separating column and comprising dissolved polymerization inhibitor, at least one of said streams comprising (meth)acrylic monomers, and the inner surface of the separating column being sprayed with the liquid stream descending in the separating column and comprising dissolved polymerization inhibitor, and the separating column having internals of whose surface at least parts are in the shadow region of the sprayed descending liquid stream, wherein parts of the surface of the internals which are in the shadow of the sprayed descending liquid stream are removed from the shadow region by being covered.

Claim 2. (Original) A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the inner surface of the separating column is sprayed with the liquid stream ascending in the separating column by the gaseous stream moving upward, as it passes through mass transfer trays, entraining small liquid droplets from the liquid phase disposed thereon and spraying them upward.

Claim 3. (Currently Amended) A process as claimed in ~~either of claims~~ claim 1 or 2, wherein the support elements installed in the separating column are covered double-T supports.

Claim 4. (Currently Amended) A process as claimed in ~~either of claims~~ claim 1 ~~or 2~~, wherein the support elements installed in the separating column are covered U-shaped supports.

Claim 5. (Currently Amended) A process as claimed in ~~any of claims~~ claim 1 ~~to 4~~, wherein the mass transfer trays are sieve trays.

Claim 6. (Original) A separating column containing a sequence of mass transfer trays and, installed as support elements, covered double-T supports and/or covered U-shaped supports.

Claim 7. (New) A process as claimed in claim 2, wherein the support elements installed in the separating column are covered double-T supports.

Claim 8. (New) A process as claimed in claim 2, wherein the support elements installed in the separating column are covered U-shaped supports.

Claim 9. (New) A process as claimed in claim 2, wherein the mass transfer trays are sieve trays.